

The Hague.

Venerable Samanera John,

I wish to express my appreciation that you live in Thailand as a Samanera, observing ten precepts. I also appreciate it that you are very sincere and write to me that you do not agree with my books. I like it if people write to me when they do not agree. It helps me to consider realities, and it can help others who have similar questions, since I might use later on what I write now for more materials.

I think you might have been a Samanera also in former lives. We all have so different accumulations, and surely, they are rooted in the past. Otherwise you would not have been able to choose the homeless life, away from your country.

We think : we do this, we do that, we prefer this or that, but there is no we, only phenomena arising because of conditions. We are like marionettes, pieces of wood which move because strings are pulled: conditions. Even the way we pick up our pen and write, or we react to this or that, all that is conditioned.

We have different accumulations, since we have different pasts with different experiences. You have accumulations for sitting crosslegged, you do not like reading the teachings very much. I have accumulations for study, for writing and reading. How could we be the same and how could we force others to be like us? Therefore, there are no rules and one cannot set a rule that everybody must sit cross-legged. I can understand that you must find my books overburdened, since I understand that you have different accumulations. I meant the books for those who like to study cause and effect in their lives and I meant it to be read not all at once, but very slowly, chapter for chapter. If you read it all at once you must feel it to be a burden. I quote a lot from the teachings because the Buddha left us his teachings as a help in our lives, the teachings are not for putting away in a cupboard.

I find it difficult to tell you in writing what I had in mind when I wrote the books, but I am sure there is some misunderstanding and what I meant did not come across to you.

You say that we are our own teacher. Yes, that is true in a way. For example, I get angry and I say nasty words. These words just come out, it seems "inspite of myself". Who is my teacher at that moment? It is the anger, arising with the citta at that moment, who teaches me that kind of akusala. It is

beyond control, it arises because of conditions, it has its roots in the past. We are marionettes. Next moment I am attached, greedy, want to have a sweet. Who teaches me? Attachment, arising with the citta. Next moment: moment of mindfulness of a nama or rupa. Who teaches me? Paññā. Please check whether it is true that we have a different teacher at each moment. Teachers change with each moment of citta.

Please check another thing. While sitting cross-legged, do you have all kinds of thoughts? Do you find that you are influenced by what you hear in a day, good or bad? It comes up in your mind again, does it not? That is why the Buddha said that it is so important to be with good people, with the right kind of people and to listen to the Dhamma. Listening is a condition for enlightenment, but first meeting the right person. Then we have to consider the truth and practice, and, surely we have to check the truth and practice it not in dependence of others, in that sense we have to be our own teachers.

I do not want to set any rules, I think now of your situation. I am writing a letter to you today and I would like to be a condition that you have kusala cittas while sitting cross-legged. You would rather spend your time with kusala than with akusala. And while sitting you cannot help that you ruminate what you have heard. Therefore I would like to tell you about a very good Australian monk, who could inspire you with many, many good thoughts. He has a group of people around him of all different nationalities who help him with kusala. It is such a privilege to be with good people. He keeps very pure Vinaya. He is a really good monk. I met him while on a pilgrimage to India. He is untiring and is ready for other people at all times of day and night. You would find inspiration when you would talk to him. We all need reminders and encouragement now and then. Name and address:

Phra Dhammadharo. Wat Phleng Vipassana. Thonbury,
Bangkok Noi.

You mentioned in your letter that the Buddha had no teacher. In many, many lives he had to accumulate sati and wisdom, and listen to many different Buddhas in order to become a sammasambuddha. Nothing happens without there being the right conditions. The fact that even the Buddha had to accumulate wisdom during endless lives makes us more patient. I wrote about the Buddha's perfections and about the holy places in

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India. These, I think, are easier to read and you might find them less burdensome. Phra Dhammadharo has copies. (People call him Phra Alān).

We need meeting the right person and listening, because our defilements cover up the truth. It makes us have many illusions. We might think: "Mindfulness is so alert, I can look at the mind". But what is it? Is it a reality which is conditioned? It is a thought, which is conditioned, a sensation, that is all. It should be seen as it is, otherwise it is the self, my mind, which looks at the mind, and then the truth will not be known. While sitting cross-legged, do you have an idea that it is self which contemplates the mind? It is useful to check this.

While sitting, is there hardness? Can it be experienced? Please check it. It is only hardness, a reality which does not know or feel anything, no floor in the hardness, no Samanera John in the hardness, it is not you. The fact that hardness appears shows that there must be a reality which experiences hardness. The experience of the hardness is not the same as the hardness. It is not you who experiences hardness, it is just another phenomenon, different from hardness. This is the development of right understanding, leading to the eradication of self and leading to knowing the four noble truths.

You wrote: ... all one needs to know are the four noble truths. But one should know what is meant by dukkha, first in theory. People might think that while they are stiff or there is pain. Because of our many defilements misunderstandings arise. Everything in our life is impermanent and therefore it cannot be happiness. When impermanence of nāmas and rūpas ^{has been} realised the truth of dukkha can be known. Hardness is a phenomenon, the experience of hardness is another one. We tend to mix them; do they not appear as a mass? The same with visible object and seeing, sound and hearing. How can the arising and falling away of each reality of nāma and rūpa be experienced when we still experience them as a mass? Thus, first there must be precise knowledge of the right object at the right moment. Also: thinking about realities must not be taken for right awareness, and are we not thinking about phenomena most of the time? Thus you see : knowing the four noble truths needs many previous conditions.

You mention clinging. This is the greatest ennemy of right mindfulness. I find there are days we are clinging more, other days a little less. When we try so much, some by sitting,

others by walking exercises, or by "naming" realities, no wisdom is developed. It is thinking about realities and not attending to characteristics when they appear, just the visible object, just the hardness, just the experience of hardness, just any nama or rupa which appears.

One can check this up: when having listened to the right person there are conditions for more right understanding and less clinging. Then one will notice that more realities appear. But also this is anattā.

Do you take the mind for self? There is no such thing as a whole we call a mind. There are different cittas, changing from moment to moment.

The aim of the books is: help people to see : this cause brings this effect. If one likes tranquillity and cultivates this, the effect is tranquillity. If one seeks the truth in one's life the phenomena in one's life should be realised as they are, and it is a different practice. In our life there are so many phenomena, all day long. Should they not be known? That is, if one seeks to know the four noble truths.

With my sincere wishes for your wellbeing and happiness,

Nina van Gorkom.